

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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IN RE: :
 :
THE EL FARO INCIDENT OFF : NTSB Accident No.
THE COAST OF THE BAHAMAS ON : DCA16MM001
OCTOBER 1, 2015 :
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Interview of: BRYAN VAGTS

Sunday,
December 6, 2015

JAXPORT
Blount Island Marine Terminal
Jacksonville, Florida

BEFORE:

MIKE KUCHARSKI, NTSB

This transcript was produced from audio
provided by the National Transportation Safety Board.

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MIKE RICHARDS, NTSB
CARRIE BELL, NTSB

1 P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

2 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Good evening,
3 everyone. My name is Mike Kucharski from the NTSB and
4 we are here to interview Bryan Vagts. Bryan, I have
5 asked you outside if you mind recording and is it okay
6 if we record this interview?

7 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. And we're going to
9 interview Bryan regarding his knowledge of operations
10 on the El Faro and a general interview regarding the
11 sinking of the El Faro.

12 And it is the 6th of December, Sunday, and
13 we are here at JAXPORT at Blount Island Terminal in the
14 Administration Building Conference Room and before we
15 go around and introduce everybody I'll give a little
16 housekeeping, if you will, or a brief, and what we are
17 all about.

18 The NTSB is an independent federal agency
19 charged with determining probable cause of
20 transportation accidents and promoting transportation
21 safety. The NTSB is not part of the Department of
22 Transportation, FAA, Coast Guard.

23 We're not part of any other agency, we're a
24 standalone agency, again, tasked with developing
25 probable cause in accidents and promoting safety in

1 transportation.

2 We have no regulatory or enforcement powers.
3 We have a party system when we conduct investigations
4 and as part of the party there is TOTE that's here, ABS
5 is also a part of the investigation as a party. They
6 are not, there is no one from ABS now that's taking
7 part in the interviews, and then we have Coast Guard as
8 you know and, of course, the NTSB.

9 If during the questioning you are unsure of
10 the questions that are being asked please feel free to
11 ask us to clarify. You can consult with your personal
12 representative if you need to, but it will be your
13 answers only that we want, okay.

14 We cannot offer any guarantee of
15 confidentiality or immunity from legal or certificate
16 actions. Now, again, we have no enforcement powers but
17 other agencies may, okay.

18 When I talk about confidentiality I
19 mentioned that a transcript will be made of this
20 recording, we don't release any recording. This
21 recording will go away, okay, but the transcript will
22 remain.

23 You can look it over. If you have any
24 suggested changes to the transcript you can suggest
25 those, okay, and we'll look them over. The transcript

1 will also become part of what's called the public
2 docket, which means it will be out there for anybody in
3 the world to see, anybody that has access to the
4 internet, okay.

5 You are, again, allowed to have a personal
6 representative, which I understand you do have one.

7 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: The representative cannot,
9 again, testify on your behalf but you are more than
10 welcome to consult with your personal representative
11 before you answer.

12 The representative really can't make any
13 objections, that's there are really not grounds for us
14 to continue to ask those questions, they ask the
15 questions, okay.

16 If you are uncomfortable with anything
17 during the interview we can always stop the recording
18 and we can discuss them if you'd like, okay.

19 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

20 MR. KUCHARSKI: Again, my name is Michael
21 Kucharski. I am from the NTSB and I am the Group
22 Chairman for Nautical Operations. And we'll go around
23 the room and to my right and behind please introduce
24 yourself.

25 MS. SERRIDGE: Melissa Serridge, HR Manager

1 with TOTE Services. I am also part of the Human
2 Performance Investigative Group.

3 MS. BELL: Carrie Bell, NTSB, Human
4 Performance Group Chairman.

5 MR. [REDACTED] Hello, Bryan. I am [REDACTED]
6 [REDACTED] I am a Coast Guard Civilian Marine Casualty
7 Investigator. I work with Carrie Bell and Melissa
8 Serridge in the Human Performance side. I am also a
9 licensed merchant marine mariner.

10 LCDR [REDACTED] Hi, I'm [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with the
11 Coast Guard. I am part of the Nautical Operations
12 Group.

13 MR. RICHARDS: Mike Richards, NTSB
14 Meteorology Group Chairman.

15 MS. FINSTERBUSCH: Patty Finsterbusch, TOTE
16 Services. I am part of the Survival Factors Group.

17 MR. PETERSON: Lee Peterson. I am the TOTE
18 Party Coordinator.

19 MR. FELTEL: Gilbert Feltel, Tanner Bishop
20 Law Firm, here as Mr. Vagts personal representative.

21 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. And on the phone who
22 do we have?

23 MR. FURUKAWA: John Furukawa, NTSB, Survival
24 Factors Group Chairman.

25 MR. STITH: Kevin Stith, TOTE Services,

1 Nautical Operations Group.

2 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Thank you, everyone.

3 And, Mr. Vagts, do you have any preference to what I
4 call you?

5 RESPONDENT: Whatever. I'm easy, sir.

6 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Thank you. Please
7 call me Mike. Okay, would you please state your name
8 and spell your name for the record?

9 RESPONDENT: Full, middle also?

10 MR. KUCHARSKI: Please.

11 RESPONDENT: Bryan Christopher Vagts, B-R-Y-
12 A-N, space, Christopher, C-H-R-I-S-T-O-P-H-E-R, Vagts,
13 V-A-G-T-S.

14 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay, thank you. Would you
15 give us a description of your background in the
16 nautical field, if you will, including your education,
17 any experience either before or after education, if you
18 have sailing experience, the license that you hold?

19 RESPONDENT: I grew up around boats. My dad
20 was in the Navy. I spent a lot of time on sailboats
21 growing up. I went to the Merchant Marine Academy, got
22 out in 2007.

23 I graduated on a Tuesday, started work on a
24 Thursday, been doing about eight months a year since,
25 and I currently hold a master's unlimited tonnage

1 license.

2 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Could you tell us
3 sailing experience? Do you have any sailing experience
4 from 2007 to the current?

5 RESPONDENT: For the better part of five or
6 six years my dad and I would take a 40-foot catamaran
7 offshore from Annapolis, Maryland, down to Key West.
8 That kind of sailing or like ship sailing?

9 MR. KUCHARSKI: Well that's good, that's
10 good, sailing experience to Key West, great place. How
11 about, yes --

12 RESPONDENT: Deep -- Okay. I worked
13 chemical tankers for 2-1/2 years, heavy lift ships for
14 another 2-1/2 years. I was on a T-AGO ship for the
15 U.S. Government for three years and that brought me to
16 TOTE around the middle of this year.

17 MR. KUCHARSKI: And could you tell us some
18 of the ships you were on?

19 RESPONDENT: I was on the S.S. Chemical
20 Pioneer as a third mate. I was on the Ocean Titan as a
21 second mate. I was on the Ocean Crescent as a second
22 mate and chief mate. I was on the USNS Victorious as
23 chief mate and captain. El Faro was chief mate and now
24 the Isla Bella as chief mate.

25 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. And you came you said

1 to TOTE about the middle of this year?

2 RESPONDENT: I started interviewing with
3 TOTE around June or July. It was right -- No, July.
4 And I took the job on the El Faro the end of August,
5 middle to end of August.

6 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Let me go back one
7 quick question. You said you graduated from the
8 Merchant Marine Academy, which one is that?

9 RESPONDENT: Kings Point.

10 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. And you said you --
11 This is Mike Kucharski speaking. You said you
12 interviewed at TOTE starting in July of this year?

13 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir. I interviewed for
14 the Captain's position on the new vessels.

15 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. And then you went to
16 work on the El Faro next?

17 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

18 MR. KUCHARSKI: And that was in August?

19 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

20 MR. KUCHARSKI: And how long did you spend
21 on the El Faro?

22 RESPONDENT: Twenty-four days.

23 MR. KUCHARSKI: And you served on the El
24 Faro for 24 days in August as chief mate?

25 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir. I believe it was

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1 August 24th to September 18th.

2 MR. KUCHARSKI: So your total experience
3 with the Ponce Class vessels is 24 days?

4 RESPONDENT: Yes.

5 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. And then you got off
6 September 18th and what did you do after that?

7 RESPONDENT: When I took the job with TOTE I
8 respectfully requested that I get off the end of
9 September for a wedding.

10 They, TOTE, honored that request and I was
11 supposed to go back to the El Faro on 13 October,
12 because I told them I wouldn't go back on the 29th of
13 September, and then this happened and so I sat at home
14 until the Isla Bella was available.

15 MR. KUCHARSKI: So had you interviewed
16 already for the Isla Bella?

17 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

18 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. So you knew you were
19 eventually going to go on the vessel?

20 RESPONDENT: Yes.

21 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. And you are currently
22 chief officer, chief mate on the Isla Bella?

23 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

24 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. So for the 24 days
25 that you were on the El Faro how many load outs did you

1 have in Jacksonville?

2 RESPONDENT: We'd do one a week, three.

3 Yes, three, because I got off in Puerto Rico.

4 MR. KUCHARSKI: And could you tell us what
5 your duties were as chief officer?

6 RESPONDENT: I am responsible for all the
7 cargo on board, making sure that it is stowed properly,
8 no damage to the cargo, no damage to the vessel,
9 responsible for stability, responsible for the deck
10 department and make sure that they are adhering to
11 proper STCW watch hours, making sure that we have
12 adequate personnel to handle the cargo.

13 Once the vessel is stowed make sure it is
14 adequately latched, make sure that whatever reefers are
15 plugged in. Once we are out at sea I am in charge of
16 standing a bridge watch as well as additional duties
17 monitoring the cargo.

18 And then arriving into port, again, you are
19 prepping, so your arrival stability, and just kind of
20 running the deck department, stability is a big key.

21 MR. KUCHARSKI: Let me just go back briefly
22 to your past experience. You were on tankers, T-AGOS,
23 heavy lifts, did you have any experience on general
24 cargo-type ships or container ships?

25 RESPONDENT: On the heavy lift ships we

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1 carry everything, so break bulk containers, heavy
2 lifts, so coming to a -- I have experience on a car
3 carrier as a cadet, so coming to the El Faro was just
4 kind of a combination of heavy lift and car carrier.

5 MR. KUCHARSKI: You were a cadet on the car
6 carrier?

7 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: Which one was that?

9 RESPONDENT: The Green Dale.

10 MR. KUCHARSKI: So you had three loads in
11 Jacksonville and could you walk us through what you did
12 from start to finish of cargo, say arrival in port and
13 then departure in port?

14 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir. So we'd arrive in
15 port, after the vessel gets spotted up by the third
16 mate and the captain together we'd set the tension on
17 the winches to make sure we are adequately alongside
18 the dock.

19 The next thing I would do is I would grab
20 the cargo paperwork, usually I bring that down from my
21 room so I wouldn't have to go all the way back up. So
22 I would grab that and I would meet the third mate on
23 the starboard quarter to deploy the car ramp.

24 There I would either, say we're in
25 Jacksonville, I'd meet with Don Matthews and provide

1 him cargo paperwork, exchange paperwork, pleasantries,
2 how are you doing, I'd get arrival drafts.

3 I'd try to get it before cargo was even
4 started, so it would be drafts. Once the first
5 trailers start rolling off it's just kind of monitoring
6 cargo, again, making sure that one is damaging any of
7 the trailers down below, and if they're running into
8 anything.

9 I would then usually pop up to the main
10 deck, keep an eye on all of the reefers that were
11 getting offloaded there and making sure they are
12 getting unplugged right, making sure we're not damaging
13 anything, making sure that the generator that would be
14 up on the bow was turned off, just kind of general
15 management.

16 After everything was kind of flowing and it
17 was just kind of taking care of itself, depending on
18 what time we arrived I would maybe go put my feet up
19 with my radio on to make sure I get my STCW hours, just
20 because, you know, when you're a mate if you can get
21 your feet up for a couple minutes you do it.

22 At that time the third mate and second mate
23 usually right on arrival would start ballasting the
24 vessel. We would discharge 1A Center Line (phonetic)
25 in Jacksonville and load it in San Juan, don't quote me

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1 on that one though, but they would take care of the
2 ballasting of the one ballast tank, additional tanks if
3 they had to, so they would take care of that.

4 If anything came up as far as damage to a
5 box or damage to the vessel I would go down and address
6 that. And that would pretty much run you all the way
7 until near the end for the reefer rush, when they start
8 loading reefer trailers as fast as they can down on
9 second deck, and so I would go down on second deck and
10 assist with that, and that's usually about an hour
11 before we finish cargo.

12 So I would assist the mate on watch and any
13 kind of standbys that we had, which would be just kind
14 of people from the Jacksonville Union Hall who would be
15 brought into help.

16 So I would go down there and assist the mate
17 on watch and the standby if there was one with the
18 loading of the reefer trailers until we finished,
19 assist with the removal of the car ramp, standby for
20 the departure stability figures from either Don or Paul
21 or Wilma down in San Juan.

22 I would take them up to my room, I would
23 plug them into the computer, double check the numbers,
24 double check the weights, double check what their
25 calculated drafts were relative to my drafts that I

1 observed, check to make sure, you know, we don't have
2 any list on the vessel.

3 If everything looked good as far as GM
4 margin, things of that sort, I would tell the captain
5 that we were good to go and I would head forward and on
6 dock.

7 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you open up any cargo
8 doors, watertight doors?

9 RESPONDENT: Occasionally I would if I
10 needed, if a mate was down in a lower hold. The mate
11 on watch usually kind of kept a close eye on the below
12 deck, all of the rolling stock.

13 So if the third mate was down all the way on
14 the tank top and they needed a door open, you know, on
15 the other side of the vessel I would pop down there and
16 open up a watertight door.

17 MR. KUCHARSKI: How about cargo fans, did
18 you work any of those?

19 RESPONDENT: Cargo fans, we would start
20 those on arrival. A lot of times what would happen
21 would be I would come back to the stern and then after
22 we got the car ramp down if we were ahead of the
23 latching, because the latching would come on board
24 and they would start unlatching cargo, so the third
25 mate would go up the bow on one side and I would take

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1 the other side and we would be turning on cargo fans.

2 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you open up dampers?

3 RESPONDENT: Usually they were all open.

4 MR. KUCHARSKI: And during the load out what
5 exactly did you do the rest of the day?

6 RESPONDENT: I would work stability. There
7 is tons of paperwork that always needs to be done,
8 garbage logs, ballast logs, ballast inventories, NBIC
9 reports, so there is plenty to keep me busy with that.

10 And, again, I would definitely take rounds
11 of the deck, I wouldn't just sit in my room and not do
12 it. So there's always stuff to do.

13 MR. KUCHARSKI: What kind of stability did
14 you work during the load out itself?

15 RESPONDENT: Well during the load out, what
16 my experience on El Faro was they had such a liner run
17 just from the standpoint of they load the exact same
18 thing week in, week out, containers week in, week out,
19 that the stability kind of worked itself.

20 We knew going in exactly what ballasts we
21 were going to have to do because that's, I hate this
22 term, but that's what's always been done. I hate that
23 term, but that it was just kind of how it was done
24 there.

25 You get in, you do ballasts, that one tank.

1 If you needed to do a little bit more you would adjust
2 on the fly, but you're using your ramp tanks which
3 would affect your list.

4 But stability wise we wouldn't get a
5 prestow, like on the Isla Bella we'll get a prestow, so
6 I can sit there and see if this is going to work or
7 not, but on El Faro usually we wouldn't get any kind of
8 prestow, we would just kind of receive the final and
9 then I would see if it jived.

10 I was told horror stories by the mate that I
11 relieved, Captain Stith, about instances where they
12 would completely mess up Puerto Rico and they would
13 give you the wrong load case.

14 So if you weren't paying attention to what
15 they were giving you you would actually sail and have
16 no idea what's exactly on board.

17 MR. KUCHARSKI: Was that leaving Puerto
18 Rico?

19 RESPONDENT: Leaving Puerto Rico, yes.

20 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay.

21 RESPONDENT: I heard again from my, the mate
22 I relieved, that usually San Juan is very good about
23 their cargo numbers, but to keep a very close eye on
24 San Juan, so I kept a close eye on everybody.

25 MR. KUCHARSKI: I'm sorry, you said San Juan

1 was usually very good on their cargo numbers?

2 RESPONDENT: Jacksonville was usually very
3 good on cargo numbers, San Juan was sometimes. You had
4 to keep a close eye out, but I did not experience any
5 issues.

6 MR. KUCHARSKI: After load out did you go
7 take drafts at all or anything else like that?

8 RESPONDENT: I took arrival drafts. As soon
9 as the gangway went down I was usually the first one on
10 the dock getting arrival numbers and I was usually the
11 last one back on board with the departure numbers, and
12 then the mates are expected to get watch -- Well they
13 get drafts every six hours.

14 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. How about the
15 offshore draft, did you take that?

16 RESPONDENT: No, sir.

17 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did anyone take it?

18 RESPONDENT: Not to my knowledge. Usually
19 if you have a level ship, no list, that's going to be
20 the same on port or starboard side. Maybe within in
21 inch, but --

22 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. In the three loads
23 that you participated in when did you obtain the final
24 stow plan and stability data?

25 RESPONDENT: At the end of cargo.

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1 MR. KUCHARSKI: And could you give us an
2 idea of how long that was before sailing?

3 RESPONDENT: Sometimes it would be, we would
4 have the gangway up and we would lower a bucket down
5 from the gangway waiting for cargo stability. You
6 can't sail the vessel without the stability.

7 In my three loads in Jacksonville and three
8 loads in San Juan, 3-1/2, we would be waiting I would
9 say more than half the time, but, you know, no matter
10 how late they were the captain would always say take
11 your time, go to your room, plug in the numbers, make
12 sure everything is good, make sure everything is right,
13 let me know that we're good to go and then we'll sail.

14 And one instance I believe that we ended up
15 sailing about a half an hour late because -- Everyone
16 was ready, the dock, or the tugs were alongside, the
17 pilot was onboard, standing by for the chief mate.

18 MR. KUCHARSKI: And you said the captain
19 said take your time, basically run through the
20 calculations, what captain was that?

21 RESPONDENT: Captain Davidson.

22 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Did you sail with
23 Captain Axelsson at all?

24 RESPONDENT: No, sir.

25 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you take the salinity

1 readings also?

2 RESPONDENT: The mate on watch did and then
3 he would read up the salinity number.

4 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you make any allowance
5 for hog or sag when computing stability?

6 RESPONDENT: You mean as -- When you say
7 making -- Say it again.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you make any allowance
9 or did you use hog and sag, taking into account hog and
10 sag, for any calculation of stability?

11 RESPONDENT: Well the CargoMax Program it
12 tells you whether it theorizes that you are hogging or
13 sagging and then you can go out and tell if it's
14 hogging or sagging just by looking at the draft marks.

15 But as I said we wouldn't, we would get here
16 you go, this is what's on your vessel, not this is what
17 we think we are going to put on your vessel, what is
18 your opinion on the stow, it's this is what you've got,
19 take it over there.

20 So to say that I had any input into the
21 calculations would be incorrect. So I did not make any
22 decisions based off of the torch (phonetic) and the
23 shear, the bending moments, the hog/sag. So I didn't
24 do that.

25 MR. KUCHARSKI: Do you have that

1 relationship between hog and sag and the actual draft
2 mark, your load line mark?

3 RESPONDENT: They are kind of different.
4 The load line is, you know, what you can load the
5 vessel to, but hogging or sagging is just how the ship
6 is bending. If you have a lot of weight in the fore
7 and aft you're going to sag. So what's the question?

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: Well I think you've answered
9 it. You said you don't account for any hog and sag
10 when you load the vessel, it's just what's in the
11 computer.

12 RESPONDENT: I don't do any of the
13 calculations, the shoreside people do that. So, again,
14 someone ashore says this is what's on your vessel, go,
15 and we say thank you, we're off, as long as everything
16 is in, you know, under the allowances.

17 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Speaking about
18 allowances did you ever compare the maximum dead
19 weight, a full displacement load that's in the Trim and
20 Stability Book compared to what was on the actual cargo
21 sheet, the load out?

22 RESPONDENT: What I would do with my cargo
23 numbers is I would read off the displacement to the
24 mate on watch on the bridge, the one filling out the
25 pilot card, and then they would use the table and

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1 actually compare the displacement to our main draft.

2 So I did not, but to the best of my
3 knowledge it was done on the bridge while preparing the
4 pilot card.

5 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Let me ask that
6 question again, maybe I wasn't, maybe not clear enough.
7 There is a number in the Trim and Stability Book and by
8 the load line regulations that this is the maximum
9 displacement that the vessel can have at her marks,
10 (inaudible) marks, center the Plimsoll mark.

11 Did you ever compare that number in your
12 Trim and Stability Book what the maximum number is with
13 what was computed on CargoMax?

14 RESPONDENT: No.

15 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. You mentioned that
16 you did the ballasts when the vessel got in, did you
17 discharge ballasts in Jacksonville?

18 RESPONDENT: Again, I usually didn't need to
19 get that involved with the ballasts, so to the best of
20 my, I'm trying -- I was only there for 24 days, I'm
21 trying to rack my brain.

22 To the best of my knowledge we would
23 discharge in Jacksonville and load in San Juan, but
24 that could be reversed, but we would load and
25 discharge. Right now it's all Isla Bella.

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1 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you do a ballast order
2 exchange while you were on the El Faro?

3 RESPONDENT: No.

4 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you have to account for
5 any fuel burn?

6 RESPONDENT: Yes.

7 MR. KUCHARSKI: And how did you account for
8 that?

9 RESPONDENT: I usually take the noon report
10 that the engineers send out with the amount of fuel
11 that they have onboard from the day before arrival, or
12 that day for that matter, depending on when we are
13 arriving.

14 I will then calculate the number of metric
15 tonnes or cubic meters burned on an hourly average and
16 then I will extrapolate forward to how much fuel I
17 believe that they will burn in the period between the
18 last noon slip and arrival.

19 Then I will take those numbers and I'll put
20 it back into CargoMax and I'll see what my expected
21 arrival draft should be and then once I hit the dock I
22 would then compare what I stipulated they should be and
23 then what they actually are.

24 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you have to add any
25 ballast for fuel burn to compensate for that?

1 RESPONDENT: No.

2 MR. KUCHARSKI: Besides CargoMax did you use
3 any other way to compute stability or check stability?

4 RESPONDENT: I did not, no.

5 MR. KUCHARSKI: Were you aware of any
6 material differences between how you and your
7 predecessor calculated stability?

8 RESPONDENT: Captain, you'll get this one.
9 There is a little bit of experience factor. I was only
10 there for 24 days, so I'll look at the program and read
11 it this way and someone who's been there for two or
12 three years might know how to, oh, you massage this
13 number just a little bit and it all comes out
14 beautiful.

15 So there is a little bit of experience
16 factor with the vessel in CargoMax.

17 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you notice any
18 differences between your calculated drafts and your
19 observed drafts?

20 RESPONDENT: I was usually pretty close.

21 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you have any handover
22 notes from your person you relieved?

23 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

24 MR. KUCHARSKI: Yes?

25 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

1 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. And were those sent
2 into the office?

3 RESPONDENT: I do not know if he sent them
4 to the office. I know that I did not send my relief
5 notes to the office.

6 MR. KUCHARSKI: I'm going to stop there on
7 stability and cargo-related questions. Does anyone in
8 the room have any follow-up questions?

9 LCDR [REDACTED] This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with the
10 Coast Guard. You mentioned salinity readings and
11 CargoMax and you would receive -- How would you receive
12 the CargoMax, you'd receive it in a thumb drive, you'd
13 receive the load?

14 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

15 LCDR [REDACTED] Okay. I'm sorry, please go
16 ahead. Go ahead, you were getting ready to say
17 something?

18 RESPONDENT: No, I wasn't. Yes, sir, that's
19 it.

20 LCDR [REDACTED] Okay. After you got the
21 salinity reading and you are in your state room, you
22 put the thumb drive in, are you also updating the
23 salinity in CargoMax with the actual salinity?

24 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

25 LCDR [REDACTED] Okay.

1 RESPONDENT: I would double check salinity,
2 the fuel onboard I would double check. You get a paper
3 load out where they have loaded every trailer and then
4 you get bay weights for all of the containers and then
5 I would go line-for-line to make sure that the weights
6 on each container bay lined up with what CargoMax was
7 showing as well as the number of trailers, the number
8 of the weight for each hold.

9 LCDR [REDACTED] Okay. You mentioned GM
10 margin, what was the GM margin that you were going by?

11 RESPONDENT: Since I found out I was going
12 to be interviewed for this I've been trying to remember
13 exactly what it was, so I honestly couldn't even
14 remember. I know that it was over zero.

15 LCDR [REDACTED] Okay. So you don't remember
16 the number, that's fine. How were you told what the
17 proper margins were or who determined what the margins
18 were?

19 RESPONDENT: The chief mate who I relieved
20 kind of gave me some this is what this captain prefers.
21 Every captain is a little bit different. Some captains
22 might want a GM margin of sailing of a half meter or,
23 you know, 0.5 feet that way with burn off you might get
24 down to like a 0.25, 0.30.

25 Other captains want it a little bit higher,

1 some captains, none that I've ever sailed with, might
2 stretch the limit a little bit, but I don't recall if
3 Captain Davidson asked me though what his preference,
4 or told me what his preference was.

5 I went with what the chief mate who I
6 relieved said and then I just kept that going.

7 LCDR [REDACTED] Okay. Great, thank you.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: Any other questions in the
9 room?

10 MS. BELL: This is Carrie Bell, NTSB. My
11 question is related just to something you said earlier.
12 You said when you're a mate when you can get your feet
13 up you do it, can you describe that for me, can you
14 explain what that means?

15 RESPONDENT: So STCW work hours dictate that
16 you have to have a certain number of rest hours per day
17 and if you are pulling into San Juan, and Captain Stith
18 can attest to this one, it seems that for a couple of
19 weeks there you'll just, you'll arrive in San Juan or
20 Jacksonville at like two in the morning and you'll have
21 been up most of the day and you still got to get sleep
22 but you still have a responsibilities to do.

23 So if cargo is going and no one is, it's
24 just kind of flowing, hey, mate, I'm going to go up to
25 my room, my radio is on if you have any issues give me

1 a call. I'm going to try and kick my feet up, I'm
2 going to try and take a little nap.

3 So sometimes it would be me curled up on my
4 couch, sometimes it would be on the recliner, sometimes
5 I'd actually take a shower and get into bed, but that's
6 what that means.

7 MS. BELL: So about how much sleep -- When
8 you are in port how much sleep would you get on
9 average?

10 RESPONDENT: In Jacksonville we would pull
11 in on, what we were doing was pulling in on a Friday
12 afternoon, we'd start offloading a little bit but by 8
13 o'clock I was pretty much done until the next morning
14 so I would actually get more sleep in port than I would
15 at sea because I don't stand a watch anymore.

16 MS. BELL: Okay. So in Jacksonville is it,
17 I mean I'm sorry, in Puerto Rico similar?

18 RESPONDENT: Similar. We're only in
19 Jacksonville -- We were in San Juan for a lot less
20 time. We did not get a true overnight. So you might
21 arrive at two in the morning and be pulling out at
22 midnight the next morning.

23 So in that 24-hour period that you are in
24 port you got to get some sleep for STCW work hours. So
25 you get cargo rolling, if you have an opportunity you

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1 get off your feet and take a little nap and go from
2 there.

3 MS. BELL: What do you say you average sleep
4 per day?

5 RESPONDENT: In port or at sea?

6 MS. BELL: Either, both.

7 RESPONDENT: At sea on the four to eight
8 watch I would usually, some mates like to take a nap
9 after they get off the deck around 12:30, I didn't like
10 doing that but I could if I was really tired get a 2-
11 hour nap in there.

12 Otherwise, I'd get off watch at 8:00 and I'm
13 probably usually in bed by 9:15, 9:30, and I'm not up
14 until 3:30, so that's 10:30, 11:30, 12:30, 1:30, 2:30,
15 3:00, seven hours, six hours.

16 MS. BELL: So you average about six hours?

17 RESPONDENT: Six, seven hours of straight
18 sleep a night at least.

19 MS. BELL: Okay. Thank you.

20 RESPONDENT: No problem.

21 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Coast Guard.

22 Going back to your background and so forth, so how did
23 you find out about the opening at TOTE?

24 RESPONDENT: One of my best friends I went
25 to school with, his name is Ben Christian, he is one of

1 the managers building the new vessels. He told me that
2 they were looking for some people and he recommended my
3 name and to get off my butt and give them a resume, so
4 I did that and with his help I got asked for an
5 interview.

6 MR. [REDACTED] And who did you interview
7 with?

8 RESPONDENT: A lot of people, Phil Morrell,
9 it was -- Sir, were you there?

10 MALE PARTICIPANT: I don't think I made
11 yours.

12 RESPONDENT: It was a number of people that
13 I -- I think Mr. Fisker-Anderson was there, I know Phil
14 Morrell was there, I know Melissa Clark was there, I
15 know Mick Kondracki was there. That may have been it.

16 MR. [REDACTED] And what did they tell you
17 they were looking for in a master for their new
18 construction ship?

19 RESPONDENT: You know, they -- I did most of
20 the talking, a lot like this. They asked me about my
21 background, my philosophies on sailing as captain,
22 because I've sailed captain for two years, and they --
23 I don't have any container experience so they thought
24 about sending me out as a second mate on the new ship
25 vessels, but I'm glad they didn't.

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1 But they didn't really say what kind of,
2 what they were looking for to be honest.

3 MR. [REDACTED] So they send you -- What was
4 your understanding of what you were supposed to do when
5 you reported aboard the El Faro on the 25th? I mean
6 were they sending you out there just to simply work as
7 chief mate?

8 RESPONDENT: Learn the crew, or learn the
9 run, learn the cargo, learn the people involved,
10 learn the TOTE way.

11 MR. [REDACTED] Did someone evaluate your
12 performance or your competency while you were aboard?

13 RESPONDENT: I got an -- Now that I think
14 about it I don't know if the captain did an eval. He
15 may have sent one without me reviewing it, but not to
16 my knowledge.

17 MR. [REDACTED] At the time did you retain a
18 position as permanent captain for another vessel?

19 RESPONDENT: I did. I went out on the El
20 Faro, I had not tendered my resignation with Crowley at
21 the time. I wanted to make sure that I enjoyed the
22 run, the people, the cargo, before I gave up my
23 captain's position, yes.

24 MR. [REDACTED] And then just previously you
25 had mentioned that you wouldn't go back on September

1 29th, could you explain those reasons?

2 RESPONDENT: I knew that the company wanted
3 me to go from the El Faro right to the new vessel and
4 through Ben I had heard that it was getting pushed
5 further and further to the right, so I saw that I was
6 going to be asked to do a month on El Faro, a week off,
7 two more months on El Faro, and then a full 80 days on
8 Isla Bella.

9 And my wife and I decided that I wanted
10 another week-and-a-half at home before I was out at sea
11 for that long. So she told me in no uncertain terms
12 that that wasn't an option, so, fortunately, I was able
13 to make that happen.

14 MR. [REDACTED] Thank you.

15 RESPONDENT: No problem, Captain.

16 MS. BELL: This is Carrie Bell, NTSB. You
17 mentioned the evaluation, you weren't sure if an
18 evaluation was done. Was that with Captain Davidson,
19 is that who you are referring to?

20 RESPONDENT: That's who would have done the
21 evaluation, yes.

22 MS. BELL: Okay. And did he give you any
23 feedback on your performance?

24 RESPONDENT: He said I did very well.

25 MS. BELL: And do you know if, did he say he

1 was going to tell someone that or --

2 RESPONDENT: No, he did not say he was going
3 to say anything at all.

4 MS. BELL: Okay. Thank you.

5 MR. KUCHARSKI: Any questions on the phone?

6 MR. STITH: This is Kevin Stith with TOTE
7 Services. I just had a quick question about the
8 CargoMax Program for you, Bryan.

9 In your experience in the couple of weeks
10 that you were there did you have any issues or any
11 problems with it, you know, did it crash or did
12 anything seem irregular?

13 RESPONDENT: No.

14 MR. STITH: Okay. And could you just
15 describe how you were familiarized or trained when you
16 came aboard the El Faro, you know, basically how long
17 you spent with the previous chief mate and, you know,
18 what you were shown and, you know, what you were told
19 about running a ship?

20 RESPONDENT: I had an excellent turnover by
21 Captain Stith. Like you said, thank you for that,
22 Kevin, I got on in Jacksonville. I don't recall what
23 day it was, but I think it was a Friday or a Saturday,
24 doesn't matter.

25 I rode with Captain Stith to Puerto Rico, so

1 I had a 3-day turnover where he showed me everything.
2 We walked the holds, we did CargoMax, he helped me with
3 the first load, he helped me with the first discharge
4 in San Juan, that partial load before he actually got
5 off the vessel.

6 So I have never had a real turnover that
7 long before on any company I have ever sailed with.
8 When I went to Captain I went as a chief mate for two
9 weeks, but I still had my chief mate responsibilities,
10 but here I came out as pretty much a supernumerary
11 chief mate and my only responsibility was to learn the
12 chief mate job.

13 So I thought that was very, very good. It
14 was good training. He showed me all, again, like I
15 said, all the stability. Yes, Kevin, sorry?

16 MR. STITH: No, I was just saying thanks.
17 Yes, that pretty much answers it unless you have
18 anything else to add.

19 RESPONDENT: No.

20 MR. STITH: Okay, great.

21 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Coast Guard, a
22 follow up. What was your understanding of how long
23 Captain Stith had served on board El Faro or El Yunque?

24 RESPONDENT: I didn't know much before I got
25 there to the vessel. When I got there I had learned

1 that he was not on all that long either, I want to say
2 a few weeks, and that he would be going -- I guess
3 there was some confusion whether he would be staying to
4 relieve Captain Davidson as Captain or going to El
5 Yunque, which is what ended up happening as captain.

6 MR. [REDACTED] Thanks.

7 LCDR [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with the Coast
8 Guard. You mentioned relief notes in addition of the
9 very thorough in-person relief process, did he also
10 give you relief notes?

11 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

12 LCDR [REDACTED] He did, okay. Do you keep
13 those?

14 RESPONDENT: I have them.

15 LCDR [REDACTED] Yes, thanks.

16 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Anything else on the
17 phone?

18 MR. FURUKAWA: No questions from John.

19 MR. KUCHARSKI: Bryan, I'd like to circle
20 back and you said you had two years as Master. What
21 ships were those?

22 RESPONDENT: The USNS Victorious.

23 MR. KUCHARSKI: Victorious?

24 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

25 MR. KUCHARSKI: And what was that?

1 RESPONDENT: T-AGOS, ocean surveillance,
2 ocean research.

3 MR. KUCHARSKI: How big is that ship?

4 RESPONDENT: Two thirty-five.

5 MR. KUCHARSKI: Two hundred thirty-five
6 feet?

7 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. And how much of that
9 time was underway time?

10 RESPONDENT: At least a year.

11 MR. KUCHARSKI: And what does a T-AGO ship
12 do?

13 RESPONDENT: The unclassified version --

14 MR. KUCHARSKI: Yes.

15 RESPONDENT: -- is we tow a cable around the
16 South China Sea, East China Sea, and operate.

17 MR. KUCHARSKI: And what kind of speed do
18 you tow at?

19 RESPONDENT: I can't really tell you that,
20 between five and ten.

21 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. And what's the
22 maximum speed that the ship had?

23 RESPONDENT: I don't know if I'm actually
24 allowed to tell you that either.

25 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay.

1 RESPONDENT: It's -- I actually had to have
2 a security clearance to get on board. All positions on
3 that vessel were considered classified because we fell
4 under the U.S. Navy 7th Fleet for submarine forces.

5 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. So your two years
6 experience as Master was on a 235-foot T-AGO ship?

7 RESPONDENT: Yes.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Could you tell us
9 what you did on bridge watch on the El Faro?

10 RESPONDENT: I got up to the bridge around
11 3:40 to 3:45. I'd always put a position down as soon
12 as I got there, hourly positions, follow the captain's
13 standing orders as far as CPAs, calling him for adverse
14 weather, restricted visibility, things of that nature.

15 Whenever the captain wanted to be called
16 you'd give him a shout and you just kind of, it's one
17 course, three ten, 130.

18 MR. KUCHARSKI: And what watch did you
19 stand?

20 RESPONDENT: 4:00 to 8:00 in the morning and
21 1600 to 2000 in the evening.

22 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you review any cargo,
23 voyage plans?

24 RESPONDENT: I'm sorry?

25 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you review any voyage

1 plans?

2 RESPONDENT: Yes.

3 MR. KUCHARSKI: And at what level did you
4 review?

5 RESPONDENT: They were always on the bridge
6 right on the bulkhead. So I would review, you know,
7 certain notes that may or may not be there just as far
8 as, you know, what kind of fishing craft you might be
9 able to expect, sometimes that would be on there, like
10 when you are going around the Bahamas certain times a
11 year you have a big sailboat race, what channel the
12 pilots in San Juan might be on, when to start calling
13 them, things like that, so, yes, I was familiar with
14 it.

15 MR. KUCHARSKI: Have you attended any ship
16 handling schools?

17 RESPONDENT: I did a ship handling class
18 down at our Union School in Dania Beach, that's it.

19 MR. KUCHARSKI: And on this T-AGO ship were
20 you ever in any big seas on there?

21 RESPONDENT: Yes.

22 MR. KUCHARSKI: How big?

23 RESPONDENT: Pretty big, we'd get some 20,
24 25-foot seas.

25 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. And I just assume,

1 but I'll ask it anyways, on the El Faro you weren't in
2 any large seas on the El Faro?

3 RESPONDENT: Define large?

4 MR. KUCHARSKI: Twenty, 25-foot?

5 RESPONDENT: No.

6 MR. KUCHARSKI: What was the largest sea
7 that you were on in El Faro?

8 RESPONDENT: Probably teens.

9 MR. KUCHARSKI: Could you qualify that,
10 teens?

11 RESPONDENT: Mid-teens, 15, 16-footers.

12 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. And how would you say
13 that ship handled, the El Faro, compared to the T-AGO
14 ship?

15 RESPONDENT: Oh, you could -- It's like
16 driving a Ferrari and a, I don't even know, a minibus.
17 They're two different. The El Faro was built like a
18 tank, the T-AGO ship, well it wasn't like, I guess they
19 are also as a tank, but it's very different.

20 The T-AGOS is a catamaran, twin hull, two
21 screw, so very different.

22 MR. KUCHARSKI: While you were on the bridge
23 did you have any other duties besides -- Or could you
24 go through maybe a little bit further, did you have any
25 weather duties or anything like that on the bridge?

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1 RESPONDENT: I would monitor the weather.
2 If the wind was over a Force 5 you'd log that ever hour
3 with the barometer and we would monitor the Bon Voyage
4 System, so, you know, if that came up we would kind of
5 keep an eye on that.

6 We would load the most recent file whenever
7 it came up and, otherwise, just maintaining a safe
8 navigational watch.

9 MR. RICHARDS: Can we ask him weather
10 questions?

11 MR. KUCHARSKI: I'm sorry?

12 MR. RICHARDS: Are you looking around for
13 weather questions?

14 MR. KUCHARSKI: Yes. Does anybody have any
15 questions on that, yes?

16 MR. RICHARDS: Yes, I have a few questions.
17 Mike Richards, NTSB. Can you describe the Bon Voyage
18 System?

19 RESPONDENT: How so?

20 MR. RICHARDS: As a user how did you
21 interface with the system, what did it provide you?

22 RESPONDENT: So it's a really neat system,
23 but I don't recall which mate would usually plug in the
24 route from Point A to Point B, whether it being going
25 Jacksonville to San Juan, so I did not personally do

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1 that.

2 So my only really interaction with it would
3 be loading in a new file, which was simply opening up
4 the email that it came in, double clicking on it, open,
5 and it would automatically load up.

6 MR. RICHARDS: Okay.

7 RESPONDENT: You would know it would load
8 because you would get a little blue bar on the upper
9 right hand corner, you'd see it kind of computing, and
10 after it was done usually it would zoom it way out, so
11 you kind of knew that it had taken.

12 MR. RICHARDS: Okay.

13 RESPONDENT: After that I would, you know,
14 you could zoom in, you can see current wind, swell, 500
15 millibar, things like that, anything you could want to
16 see weather related it pretty much showed.

17 MR. RICHARDS: Okay. Where did you receive
18 those emails that have the data?

19 RESPONDENT: They came right up to the
20 bridge. To my knowledge the captain would receive them
21 and then he would forward them up to the bridge.

22 MR. RICHARDS: How many emails of data would
23 you get per day?

24 RESPONDENT: I can honestly not tell you
25 about per day. I know that I would usually get maybe

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1 one per watch.

2 MR. RICHARDS: Okay. I'd like to understand
3 the email system aboard the El Faro just a little bit
4 better. Were you able to send emails to somebody
5 onshore?

6 RESPONDENT: Yes.

7 MR. RICHARDS: Okay. How did that -- Were
8 you able to do that from the bridge?

9 RESPONDENT: Yes.

10 MR. RICHARDS: Okay. So our understanding
11 is that to allow an email that someone wrote to
12 disseminate out required action by the captain, is that
13 your understanding?

14 RESPONDENT: That is my understanding, yes.

15 MR. RICHARDS: Oh. Can you describe the
16 email system as you understand it for this type of
17 email?

18 RESPONDENT: As I understand it it worked
19 for any station for that matter, not just the bridge,
20 even my office for that matter. You type up an email,
21 you hit send, and it goes into an out queue and the
22 captain, again as I understand it, has to connect to
23 whatever server they used.

24 I don't recall what the actual unit or
25 company was, whether it be Broadband or whoever,

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1 Inmarsat. So he would connect and it would push all
2 the emails in the out queue out and any emails that
3 were in a queue waiting to be received would be
4 received.

5 And then from there, if my wife sent an
6 email to the chief mate's office it would then get
7 forwarded to my room. It wouldn't go through the
8 captain as I understand it.

9 MR. RICHARDS: As you understand it. On an
10 average day how many times would the captain, and we're
11 talking Captain Davidson, on the El Faro press the
12 button or take whatever action is required in order to
13 send and receive?

14 RESPONDENT: On a normal nothing going on
15 business day I know he would always wake up at about
16 5:30, 5:45, because he'd be on the bridge around
17 quarter till, ten till, ten till six, and then we'd
18 usually spend about an hour just kind of talking on the
19 bridge and I want to say he would usually send
20 something around 7:00, and then, you know, at really
21 kind of random points during the day, but it's kind of
22 a loaded question.

23 If there was something going on, sometimes
24 the chief would come up to him and say hey, something's
25 going on, I need to send an email out, and he would

1 send it out.

2 Other days where it was a weekend it felt
3 like I wouldn't get any emails. You know, so it's kind
4 of -- Did I kind of answer your question?

5 MR. RICHARDS: Okay, thank you. To your
6 knowledge did anyone else besides the captain have the
7 ability to send and receive emails through satellite?

8 RESPONDENT: Not to my knowledge.

9 MR. RICHARDS: Okay. I'll defer.

10 MR. KUCHARSKI: Defer?

11 MR. RICHARDS: Yes.

12 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay.

13 MS. BELL: Are we still talking weather?

14 MR. KUCHARSKI: Yes. Yes, I'd like to
15 finish up on the weather.

16 MS. BELL: Okay. Oh, I mean I have
17 questions, but a few of them (inaudible).

18 MR. KUCHARSKI: Weather observations, did
19 you send in any weather observations on your watch?

20 RESPONDENT: On my watch I did not, no.

21 MR. KUCHARSKI: How about at the end of your
22 watch, did you log weather?

23 RESPONDENT: Logged it, yes, sir. If it was
24 under Force 5 I would log it at the end of my watch.

25 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you put any recordings

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1 of the weather into the logbook?

2 RESPONDENT: Well usually my kind of line
3 usually reads something along the lines of what kind of
4 wind, what kind of sea, what kind of visibility, and
5 then I log out.

6 So that would probably, that's usually the
7 extent from me. It's, you know, vessel riding easy in
8 northeasterly wind and swell with good visibility,
9 watch relieved by so and so.

10 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. We have many copies
11 of the logbook. You have one (inaudible) writing, on
12 the side there is numbers that are entered.

13 RESPONDENT: Yes.

14 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you enter any numbers in
15 the logbook for the weather?

16 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir. Yes.

17 MR. KUCHARSKI: Could you tell us what those
18 were?

19 RESPONDENT: I would do my, your per gyro
20 compass, per magnetic compass. I would do the
21 barometer, the wind direction, the force, whether it be
22 Force 1 through 5, whatever, or even higher, I would do
23 the wet bulb/dry bulb temp and sea temp.

24 MR. KUCHARSKI: And how did you calculate
25 the wind speed and direction?

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1 RESPONDENT: A lot of times we kind of went
2 off of the Bon Voyage to kind of see what it should be
3 and then we would go out and look at what the waves and
4 winds were doing.

5 MR. KUCHARSKI: Was there an anemometer and
6 wind vane on there?

7 RESPONDENT: There was. I do not recall if
8 it worked or not. I don't believe it did.

9 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. And was there more
10 than one or was there just one?

11 RESPONDENT: To the best of my knowledge
12 there was one.

13 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Were you given any
14 training on the Bon Voyage System?

15 RESPONDENT: Just what kind of -- Captain
16 Stith had kind of showed me on watch, it's kind of
17 idiot proof.

18 MR. KUCHARSKI: Was there a manual up there
19 that you ever looked at or was there a manual on the
20 bridge?

21 RESPONDENT: I do not know if there was a
22 manual or not. I did not look at it myself.

23 MR. KUCHARSKI: Were there any other forms
24 of weather information that you could gather on the
25 bridge?

1 RESPONDENT: You could get a Sat-C message.
2 We were always getting Sat-C messages about weather,
3 where the low pressure systems are located. You know,
4 we kept a very close eye especially during, if it was
5 tropical storm season.

6 So we were always tracking a couple storms
7 with Bon Voyage and we would also kind of keep an eye.
8 Me, what I gathered from other vessels is usually when
9 I get a Sat-C, a GMDSS message, I'll read it and I will
10 highlight the areas that kind of pertain to us as far
11 as storms that might be near us, low pressure systems
12 might be near, there's gale force winds that might be
13 near us, that's what I did, so that would be another
14 one.

15 NAVTC sends them out occasionally, so NAVTCs
16 and Sat-C.

17 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did the Sat-C information
18 give you sea state?

19 RESPONDENT: It does. It does. It gives
20 you sustained winds. Wow. You're in the Coast Guard
21 does it -- I know it does winds.

22 LCDR [REDACTED] I'm not being interviewed
23 though.

24 RESPONDENT: Ah, okay. Now that you put me
25 on the spot like that I can honestly, I don't recall if

1 it actually gives sea state. I know it gives winds.
2 It depends. If it's a storm it'll give the knot winds
3 that it sustained.

4 And I know I've seen, every now and then
5 you'll see a Beaufort Scale thrown in there, like
6 force whatever, that usually kind of pertains to wind
7 and sea though.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: We were told that Sat-C is a
9 subscription. Is it a Coast Guard, you're saying it's
10 a Coast Guard information?

11 RESPONDENT: The Sat-C is not, as far as I
12 know it's not a subscription. You just, it's just
13 received, it's sent out. Now you can send emails
14 through the Sat-C and that is a subscription because
15 you're sending something out of the satellite.

16 But, you know, GMDSS weather, that just
17 comes in. To the best of my knowledge you don't have
18 to pay for that, that just kind of comes in. I have
19 never been on a ship that doesn't have that.

20 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Any follow-up
21 questions?

22 MS. BELL: Carrie Bell, NTSB. In the time
23 that you were on El Faro did you ever sail in heavy
24 weather or expected heavy weather?

25 RESPONDENT: We were monitoring a tropical

1 storm that was supposed to go north of Puerto Rico and
2 it did something unexpected. It turned left, clipped
3 Puerto Rico, and then came up through Puerto Rico and
4 the Dominican Republic and pretty much hit us dead on.

5 We went the Old Bahama Channel to avoid it's
6 expected track. It, again, didn't do what it was
7 expected, and that's when the seas got up again in, you
8 know, the 15, 16-foot range, but it was right on the
9 bow and we just went right through it.

10 MS. BELL: So how was the decision made to
11 go the Old Bahama Channel?

12 RESPONDENT: The captain made the decision,
13 so he, second mate, we're going Old Bahama Channel.
14 Okay. And that's pretty much what it was. Again, we
15 were monitoring this tropical storm.

16 From in Jacksonville we were monitoring it
17 even before we got into Jacksonville. With the Bon
18 Voyage System you can sit there and click out a couple
19 of days in advance.

20 So you can sit there and say okay, hey, next
21 time we're coming to the south we might have to deal
22 with this storm. So he decided to go Old Bahama
23 Channel because, again, the forecast, I don't recall
24 exactly what it was, I don't remember exactly which
25 storm it was, but the track was supposed to take it

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1 over Puerto Rico and then kind of hang out east of the
2 Bahamas.

3 So the captain made the decision to go Old
4 Bahama Channel to, you know, do the prudent thing, go
5 play it safe, and the storm decided to, again, tack to
6 port and we ended up hitting it.

7 MS. BELL: Were there conversations taking
8 place about which route you were going to take between
9 you and him or him and the second mate?

10 RESPONDENT: To the best of my knowledge he
11 didn't talk to the second mate about it. I know he
12 didn't talk to me about it. It was just this is what
13 we are going to do and that's what we did.

14 MS. BELL: Do you know if there were any
15 conversations after the fact about going that way?

16 RESPONDENT: Between?

17 MS. BELL: The captain and you or anyone,
18 did you hear of any conversations or witness any?

19 RESPONDENT: I didn't hear about any
20 conversations, didn't witness any, I didn't have any.

21 MS. BELL: Thank you.

22 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Coast Guard. I
23 just, you know, August 25th you get aboard the ship,
24 the 24th, 25th, you're getting ready to sail out,
25 you're first voyage on the El Faro, tell me about the

1 gathering where the captain gathered the officers and
2 significant personnel aboard and discussed that voyage
3 with regard to that tropical storm?

4 RESPONDENT: I don't recall if it was the
5 first trip. I don't think it was. I think it was like
6 the second trip maybe.

7 MR. [REDACTED] And when did you get aboard?

8 RESPONDENT: On the 24th of August. I don't
9 recall it being the first trip. Irregardless, we
10 didn't have any kind of sit down pow-pow with the
11 officers, the senior officers, we didn't really have
12 that.

13 Word was kind of passed when were getting,
14 hey, it's going to get bumpy, make sure your gear is
15 stowed, make sure the deck is kind of good to go. We
16 secured the deck so no one could go down on the second
17 deck. So we took those precautions.

18 Him and I would have this discussion, you
19 know, in the mornings when I would be up on watch and I
20 would disseminate that information to my group. I
21 don't know what he did with the engineers.

22 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. So you are standing
23 the, which watch were you on?

24 RESPONDENT: The 0400 to 0800.

25 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. So talk to me about the

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1 issues that were going on with the boiler on that
2 voyage?

3 RESPONDENT: I'm not an engineer. The only
4 thing I know about with the boiler was once leaving San
5 Juan, as far as I understand it, they were performing
6 testing on the boiler, I couldn't tell you why, but we
7 left.

8 We asked for permission to leave San Juan
9 under one boiler and we were on one boiler for I want
10 to say about 30 to 40 percent of the trip up to
11 Jacksonville before we put the second boiler back on.

12 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. The voyage I am
13 referring to though is the one where the vessel
14 deviated through the Old Bahama Channel route. There
15 is message traffic back and forth to TOTE Management
16 saying they had a weeping economizer tube in the boiler
17 and they were running at reduced RPM.

18 And what I am asking is as an officer of the
19 watch, in charge of the navigational watch, did you
20 know that?

21 RESPONDENT: No.

22 MR. [REDACTED] Okay.

23 RESPONDENT: I may have been -- Again, I
24 don't recall that instance. What may have been passed
25 down was, you know, there may have been engine trouble

1 and we're running at a reduced RPM, but as to, you
2 know, the economizer and boiler tubes --

3 MR. [REDACTED] Do you recall any entries in
4 the night orders regarding anything specific related to
5 engineering?

6 RESPONDENT: Not to the best of my
7 knowledge.

8 MR. [REDACTED] And then I think Ms. Bell
9 talked about it, but I want to just kind of zero in on
10 it. You were on from the 25th of August till the 18th
11 of September, correct?

12 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir.

13 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. At any time did Captain
14 Davidson talk to you about the decision he had made to
15 take that Old Bahama voyage after the voyage was
16 complete?

17 RESPONDENT: We may have made a joke about
18 it when we were getting hit by it. Again, it may have
19 gone something along the lines of, you know, we go this
20 way and the storm decides to, you know, do exactly what
21 it wasn't supposed to.

22 There may have been a conversation like
23 that. I couldn't tell you what was said, but I do
24 recall something to the effect of, you know, just kind
25 of that it was (inaudible). It was kind of a surprise

1 that it had done that.

2 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. On that same Old Bahama
3 voyage do you recall any specific instructions that the
4 captain gave to you, like monitor the Bon Voyage, wake
5 me up, you know, if something changes on the course,
6 anything like that you recall?

7 RESPONDENT: With regards to weather
8 monitoring and on the bridge, no. Mainly because he,
9 it was, the winds were continuing to build and he was
10 monitoring them and so when I was on watch it was kind
11 of a sustained thing and -- No.

12 MR. [REDACTED] Do you recall any discussions
13 about deviating through New Providence Channel?

14 RESPONDENT: I did not have any
15 conversations about that, no.

16 MR. [REDACTED] And then just -- Captain
17 Kucharski asked you a question about the ship handling
18 class you attended, what was the duration of that
19 class?

20 RESPONDENT: I took a 2-week one once and I
21 took a, I want to say the second class was a week.

22 MR. [REDACTED] Thanks, Bryan.

23 RESPONDENT: No problem, Captain.

24 MR. RICHARDS: Mike Richard, NTSB. On the
25 August route in the Old Bahama Channel, which was, my

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1 understanding is it was taken at least in part to avoid
2 weather from the normal route?

3 RESPONDENT: Yes.

4 MR. RICHARDS: What products were you using
5 to monitor the forecast track of this storm?

6 RESPONDENT: Bon Voyage and our Sat-C
7 messages.

8 MR. RICHARDS: Did you notice a difference
9 between those two products for the forecast track?

10 RESPONDENT: I don't recall.

11 MR. RICHARDS: What product was the captain
12 using to monitoring the wind?

13 RESPONDENT: I couldn't tell you what he was
14 using.

15 MR. RICHARDS: Okay. What time of day did
16 you hit the strongest, the 15 to 16-foot waves, do you
17 recall?

18 RESPONDENT: I think it was early in the --
19 It wasn't early, it was early to midday. It was about,
20 to the best of my knowledge it was like 6:00 to 10:00
21 in the morning, something to that effect.

22 MR. RICHARDS: Okay.

23 RESPONDENT: Because we secured the deck
24 that morning, or maybe -- No. I honestly don't recall.
25 It may have been the night before where it got nasty

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1 but I wasn't up, so I couldn't tell you what it was.

2 I know on my watch from 4:00 to 8:00 it was
3 about 14 to 15-foot, so I couldn't tell you what they
4 experienced that night before.

5 MR. RICHARDS: Two more questions. Do you
6 recall the maximum wind speed that you encountered and
7 how you estimated that?

8 RESPONDENT: I do not.

9 MR. RICHARDS: Okay. Did anybody, did any
10 officer, plot a hurricane track on hand plot?

11 RESPONDENT: Sometimes. Not all of them.
12 There was a chart on the aft starboard side, there was
13 a table right outside the bathroom that was right next
14 to our GMDSS station where we kept a chart of the, it
15 was a very small-scale chart of the Caribbean, West
16 Indies, and occasionally there would be plots on there.

17 MR. RICHARDS: Who would do the plotting, do
18 you know?

19 RESPONDENT: I know I put one once. It's
20 supposed to kind of fall on the mate on watch or, you
21 know, if the captain comes up and sees the GMDSS paper,
22 you know, the messages, he might do it.

23 I don't recall if I ever saw him do it, but
24 it would usually be the mate on watch.

25 MR. RICHARDS: Am I correct to assume that

1 the product you would use to hand plot would be the
2 information coming from Sat-C?

3 RESPONDENT: Yes.

4 MR. RICHARDS: Okay. Thank you.

5 MR. KUCHARSKI: Questions on the phone?

6 MR. FURUKAWA: No questions from John.

7 MR. STITH: Nothing from Kevin.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: Bryan, while you were
9 onboard -- This is Mike Kucharski speaking. While you
10 were onboard was there a riding crew onboard?

11 RESPONDENT: Yes.

12 MR. KUCHARSKI: And where were they from?

13 RESPONDENT: I learned after the fact,
14 Poland.

15 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. And what work do they
16 perform?

17 RESPONDENT: They were performing, they were
18 doing some small welding jobs around the vessel
19 assisting with the two American contractors who were
20 crew members on their vacation time, prepping the
21 vessel to go back to the Alaska run.

22 So they were reinstalling, I guess one of
23 the major jobs that I remember them working on was they
24 were reinstalling or installing winches to be used for
25 a midship ramp on the starboard side. That was one of

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1 the major jobs that they were doing.

2 MR. KUCHARSKI: And when the weather was
3 rough, what you described, did they work out on deck
4 during those days or that day?

5 RESPONDENT: I don't recall. I know the
6 captain secured the deck for all crew members, so I
7 didn't go down there.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: The captain secured the deck
9 so no one was allowed on the second deck?

10 RESPONDENT: Yes. That was his intent, now
11 -- Yes, I'll leave it at that.

12 MR. KUCHARSKI: So you don't know what they
13 did during that day?

14 RESPONDENT: I don't. Again, the deck was
15 secured. I didn't go down there, so I couldn't tell
16 you if somebody was or was not.

17 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you get involved in any
18 of the training of those crew members, the riding crew?

19 RESPONDENT: Yes, sir. As one of the other
20 chief mate's responsibilities is in charge of training.
21 So you'll make sure that -- TOTE has quarterly
22 requirements that must be met for fire drills, boat
23 drills, and additional training. So, yes.

24 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you personally train
25 them?

1 RESPONDENT: They attended -- We had a fire
2 drill. As supernumeraries their muster station would
3 have been to report to the bridge, but since my
4 responsibility is on the scene I could not tell you if
5 they showed up.

6 You'd have to talk to the person who was on
7 the bridge, which would be the captain and the second
8 mate.

9 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Did you give them any
10 indoctrination training when they came onboard?

11 RESPONDENT: Most of them were already
12 onboard when I got there. When one person would show,
13 kind of swap out, because there was a little bit of a
14 language gap a lot of times the head of the group would
15 indoctrinate his guy with the help of the contractor
16 who was kind of there to liaison between the ship's
17 crew and the Pols, the Polish workers.

18 MR. KUCHARSKI: Questions, follow-on
19 questions?

20 MS. BELL: Carrie Bell, NTSB. You mentioned
21 that there were two American crew members who assisted
22 them but were on vacation, is that what you said?

23 RESPONDENT: As I understand it the chief
24 engineer and the first engineer who were on their
25 vacation, so you'll baseball a job. So you'll have two

1 captains, two -- So while one is at work one will be on
2 vacation.

3 So to the best of my knowledge the two
4 contractors who were there were very familiar with the
5 vessel because one was the chief and one was the first
6 engineer of that vessel and they were there to liaison
7 between the ship's crew and them just because the
8 amount of work that they were doing they couldn't ask
9 the ship's crew to do that.

10 MS. BELL: So one of them was onboard?

11 RESPONDENT: To the best of my knowledge. I
12 know that when I was there there was two. I don't know
13 how many were on when it went down.

14 MS. BELL: Yes.

15 RESPONDENT: So there may not have been any
16 then, I don't know.

17 MS. BELL: Okay. Thank you.

18 MR. [REDACTED] Coast Guard.
19 Just to be clear, when you said they had a little bit
20 of a language gap, was it a little bit?

21 RESPONDENT: Some of them didn't speak very
22 little English. A few of them, I want to say like two
23 of them, their English was passable.

24 MR. [REDACTED] Thank you.

25 MR. KUCHARSKI: This is Mike Kucharski. Did

1 you perform any training in immersion suit, the donning
2 of the immersion suits?

3 RESPONDENT: I did not, no.

4 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Questions on the
5 phone?

6 MR. FURUKAWA: Nothing from John.

7 MR. STITH: Nothing from Kevin.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: This is Mike Kucharski back.
9 How would you describe your relationship with Captain
10 Davidson?

11 RESPONDENT: It was okay. We didn't have
12 any problems at least that I was aware of. He never
13 yelled at me. He never raised his voice. I can't
14 recall ever pissing him off, so it was okay I guess.

15 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did you feel comfortable in
16 challenging any decision that he made?

17 RESPONDENT: Are you asking would I have?

18 MR. KUCHARSKI: Yes, yes.

19 RESPONDENT: I honestly don't know.

20 MR. KUCHARSKI: Were there any special heavy
21 weather precautions that you went through prior to
22 heading into the tropical storm?

23 RESPONDENT: Again, we secured the deck, we
24 made sure the latching were tight before we hit the
25 weather. We made sure that all of the hatches going

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1 into lower holds were closed and secured.

2 We made sure that any loose gear on the deck
3 was picked up. So pretty much just kind of general
4 deck securing, just making sure that anything, you
5 know, again, (inaudible) deck department, so I was more
6 involved with securing of deck and making sure that the
7 cargo was good to go on the deck side.

8 What they did in the engine room I couldn't
9 tell you.

10 MR. KUCHARSKI: Were there written
11 instructions that you followed?

12 RESPONDENT: No.

13 MR. KUCHARSKI: When you went down --

14 RESPONDENT: There is. If you look in our
15 stability book it kind of has some general written
16 down, but not from Captain Davidson.

17 MR. KUCHARSKI: What kind of general stuff
18 is in the stability book for heavy weather sailing?

19 RESPONDENT: For, you know, stability
20 purposes. You know, if you wanted to take on storm
21 ballasts or if you wanted to -- Just general, in more
22 of a stability kind of aspect there is, and in most
23 (inaudible) stability booklets there is a heavy weather
24 section, but I did not read it on the El Faro, but
25 there is that.

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1 MR. KUCHARSKI: On the three weeks that you
2 were chief mate on the El Faro did you go down in the
3 cargo holds at sea?

4 RESPONDENT: Yes.

5 MR. KUCHARSKI: How did you get down there?

6 RESPONDENT: I would use either the port or
7 starboard side, the little hatches that were fore and
8 aft of each cargo hold and do cargo runs.

9 MR. KUCHARSKI: Does Number 3 hold have both
10 the port and starboard little hatch?

11 RESPONDENT: It depends if you're talking
12 pre-jumbleizing (phonetic) or post-jumbleizing
13 (phonetic). So we had a 1, a 2, a 2A, a 4, and a 5.
14 Some people numbered them 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 though. Yes.
15 Yes, there was a port and starboard hatch.

16 MR. KUCHARSKI: Where the emergency fire
17 pump was, do you know where the emergency fire pump,
18 what hold that's in?

19 RESPONDENT: Yes, yes.

20 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did there happen -- Was
21 there a scuttle on, a little hatch as you called it, on
22 either side to go down into the hold where the
23 emergency fire pump was?

24 RESPONDENT: Yes.

25 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Did you call the

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1 bridge when you went down and opened those scuttles?

2 RESPONDENT: No.

3 MR. KUCHARSKI: Those little hatches, I'm
4 sorry?

5 RESPONDENT: No, I did not. There was a
6 placard about three feet by a foot and a half to two
7 feet and it would just indicate that somebody was in
8 the hold, and if someone was in the hold you were told
9 leave it open for the person down there.

10 We were told that if you want to shut a
11 hatch, if you didn't open it you need to go down to the
12 hold and make sure no one is in there. But even if
13 they had closed it you can still open it from
14 underneath, it's just heavy.

15 MR. KUCHARSKI: And so you didn't call
16 anybody when you went into the little hatches, did you
17 call anybody after you left it?

18 RESPONDENT: No.

19 MR. KUCHARSKI: Don't report to the bridge,
20 okay. Did you open any of the large cargo watertight
21 doors that go into the holds or go between the holds?

22 RESPONDENT: I did not, no.

23 MR. KUCHARSKI: Did any of the deck
24 department open it?

25 RESPONDENT: The deck department had -- No,

1 not to the best of my knowledge. One of the engineers
2 was responsible for maintenance on those doors, so to
3 my understanding if he was available to open a
4 watertight door and exercise it he would do so, lube
5 it, grease it, and then (inaudible).

6 MR. KUCHARSKI: So was that part of the
7 regular maintenance routine to do that?

8 RESPONDENT: Yes.

9 MR. KUCHARSKI: Open the doors, lubricate
10 the what?

11 RESPONDENT: The dogging, the dogs. Again,
12 to the best of my knowledge. Engineers maintained that
13 equipment, so for more information on that you would
14 have to ask one of them.

15 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Any follow-up
16 questions? Carrie?

17 MS. BELL: Carrie Bell, NTSB. Mike had
18 asked you earlier about your relationship with Captain
19 Davidson. Can you tell me about how long you worked
20 with him on El Faro?

21 RESPONDENT: The entire time, 24 days.

22 MS. BELL: Twenty-four days, okay. And can
23 you just give me your, what was your first impression
24 of him?

25 RESPONDENT: Hmm. It was a long time ago.

1 I know it wasn't negative. I would have remembered
2 that.

3 MS. BELL: So what's your overall impression
4 of him now?

5 RESPONDENT: Now. (Inaudible), but I
6 thought he was, he always looked out, from what I saw
7 he looked out for his crew. He was always, you know,
8 kind of, his crew first, crew first, crew first.

9 There's nothing out here that's, you know,
10 that you should risk an injury for, so he said the
11 right things. I was never in a situation where he had
12 to really prove that though.

13 I would have sailed with him again. I told
14 him that.

15 MS. BELL: Would you say he got along with
16 everyone?

17 RESPONDENT: You're not going to please
18 everyone out at sea, especially with the Jacksonville
19 Union Hall, but I wouldn't say he had any enemies that
20 I know of.

21 MS. BELL: So on the bridge the general
22 working environment, how would you describe that?

23 RESPONDENT: Relaxed.

24 MS. BELL: When he was present?

25 RESPONDENT: Even when he was present, yes.

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1 MS. BELL: Okay. That's all I've got right
2 now.

3 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Coast Guard.
4 Going back, heading down into heavy weather you talked
5 about what your responsibilities were in terms of
6 securing gear and checking the ship and so forth, what
7 precautions did you take in terms of checking the boats
8 and other primary lifesaving equipment?

9 RESPONDENT: I personally did not do any of
10 it. That would fall under the third mate. I could not
11 tell you if the captain passed on any specific
12 information to him.

13 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. Thank you.

14 MR. KUCHARSKI: Questions on the phone?

15 MR. FURUKAWA: Nothing from John.

16 MR. KUCHARSKI: Kevin?

17 MR. STITH: No questions from me.

18 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Anything else you
19 would like add, Bryan?

20 RESPONDENT: No, sir.

21 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. The interview has
22 stopped, 2138. Thank you for your time.

23 -END-

24

25

C E R T I F I C A T E

MATTER: EL FARO INCIDENT OFF THE COAST
OF THE BAHAMAS ON OCT. 1, 2015
NTSB Accident No. DCA16MM001
Interview of Bryan Vagts

DATE: 12-06-14

I hereby certify that the attached transcription of page 1 to 68 inclusive are to the best of my professional ability a true, accurate, and complete record of the above referenced proceedings as contained on the provided audio recording; further that I am neither counsel for, nor related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this action in which this proceeding has taken place; and further that I am not financially nor otherwise interested in the outcome of the action.



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TABLE OF CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW FOR
BRYAN VAGTS
 TAKEN ON
DECEMBER 6, 2015

PAGE NUMBER	LINE NUMBER	CURRENT WORDING	CORRECTED WORDING
11	14	latched	lashed
13	4	be drafts	be arrival drafts
13	6	that one	that no one
14	20	Paul	Paula
15	5-6	on dock	undock
15	23 (2x)	latchings	lasher, lashers
15	24	unlatching	unlashing
16	20	ballasts	ballast
20	22	torch	torsion
23	1	order	water
23	22	stipulated	calculated
47	15 (2x)	NAVTC	NAVTEXT
49	13	he, second	he said second
52	10	pow-pow	pow-wow
60	21	didn't speak	Spoke
63	12(2x)	jumbleizing	jumbo-izing

If to the best of your knowledge, no corrections are needed kindly circle the statement "no corrections needed" and initial in the space provided.

NO CORRECTIONS NEEDED. _____

 Printed Name of Person providing the above information

 Signature of Person providing the above information

12/21/15
 Date

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW FOR BRYAN VAGTS
TAKEN ON
DECEMBER 6, 2015

PAGE NUMBER	LINE NUMBER	CURRENT WORDING	SUGGESTED CORRECTED WORDING	NTSB RESPONSE
11	14	latched	lashed	AGREE
13	4	be drafts	be arrival drafts	Do not agree. Transcript correct as is
13	6	that one	that no one	AGREE
14	20	Paul	Paula	AGREE
15	5-6	on dock	undock	AGREE
15	23 (2x)	latchings	lasher, lashers	Do not agree with first suggestion. Sounds like "lashings." AGREE with second correction
15	24	unlatching	unlashing	AGREE
16	20	ballasts	ballast	Do not agree. Transcript correct as is
20	22	torch	torsion	AGREE
23	1	order	water	AGREE
23	22	stipulated	calculated	Do not agree. Transcript correct as is
47	15 (2x)	NAVTC	NAVTEXT	AGREE
49	13	he, second	he said second	Do not agree. Transcript correct as is
52 should be page 51	10	pow-pow	pow-wow	AGREE
60	21	didn't speak	Spoke	Do not agree. Transcript correct as is
63	12(2x)	umbeizng	jumbo-izing	AGREE

If to the best of your knowledge, no corrections are needed kindly circle the statement "no corrections needed" and initial in the space provided.

NO CORRECTIONS NEEDED. _____

Printed Name of Person providing the above information

Signature of Person providing the above information

12/21/15
date